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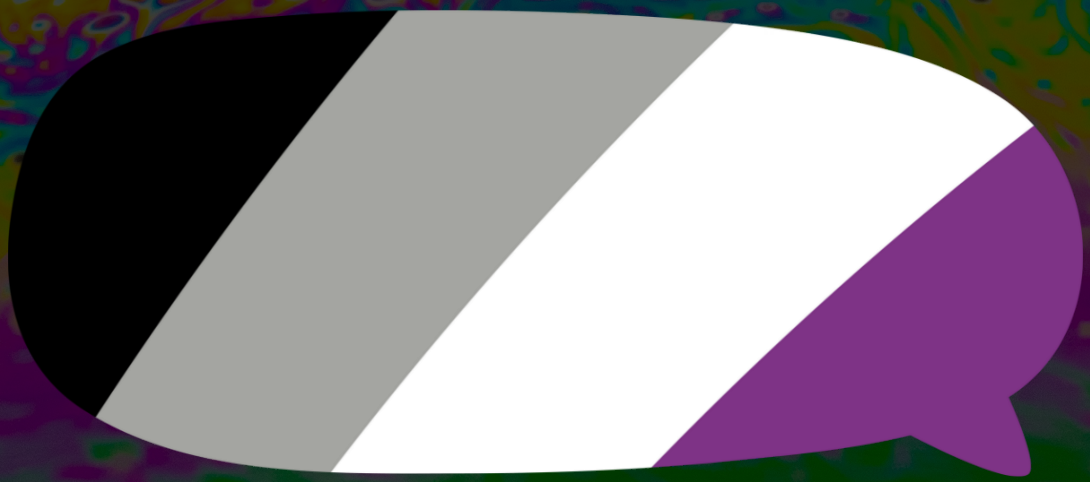

THE ASEXUAL ISSUE

Volume 4, Issue 2 Fall/Winter 2024

Impostor

A Poetry Journal

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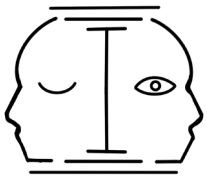

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Impostor syndrome: the belief that talents and accomplishments are fraudulent or the result of luck.

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From the Editors

Welcome to the fall/winter edition of *Impostor*, aka, The Asexual Issue! Asexual-spec editors Coral and L.A. Wilson have had a wonderful time reading and selecting the work that appears in these pages.

The speech bubble on the cover in the asexual pride flag colors is left blank on purpose, signifying the fact that there is no "right" way to have a relationship with asexuality. The background art—a photograph of a soap bubble displaying a full spectrum of color, tonality, and reflection by Mulyadi*—references the spectrum of the orientation.

The asexual experience is innately multifaceted and different for each person. There are no hard and fast rules here, just as there weren't with our expectations reading submissions for this issue. The contributors herein engage the idea, reality, and experience of asexuality in myriad ways.

Additionally, while we're seeing greater strides in the portrayal of the LGBTQ+ experience in recent years, asexuality and its many facets often remain overlooked. We wanted to shed a spotlight on this lesser-seen orientation.

We're thrilled to share the work of these fourteen poets and we hope you enjoy this issue. As always, thank you to our readers and supporters.

And take care of yourselves out there!

Sincerely,
L.A. and Coral

Our Mission

Impostor syndrome: the belief that talents and accomplishments are fraudulent or the result of luck.

Perhaps you've experienced it yourself—we certainly have! When we created this journal, we knew that first and foremost, we wanted to foster a welcoming and encouraging space for poets, who—like ourselves—may feel intimidated by the established literary world, or that their credentials (or lack thereof) aren't "good enough." Publication history and academic background hold no influence over our view of what constitutes a poet. Your voice matters and we want to hear it!

Table of Contents

Gage Baldwin
It's really inconvenient that I have to choose between fucking someone or loving them. 8

Romy Morreo
The Pleasure is All Theirs 9

Maggie Lisbon
Poem in the Voice of the Author's Queerness 10

Wren Bee
Intimacy 12

Sabah Merchant
Indecipherable 13

C.K. Winter
Pride 2024 14

Meredith Stafford
Ace Ring 15

Maia Brown-Jackson
I don't deserve a poem 16

Kinno
This is a remix to heartbreak 19

Kee Harriott
MAIDENHEAD 21

Bart Edelman
Before Bed 22

Nathan Chu
Go on, Murder Your Lovelies 23

Coney Zhang
Rejected Study on Oddities of Existence 24

Ria Hill
I'm Asexual, BUT 25

It's really inconvenient that I have to choose between fucking someone or loving them.

Gage Baldwin

Fucking is an an art project. Painting
our bodies on our bodies with our bodies,
sharing the colors we're only allowed
to dream of behind closed doors

And I wish we could keep painting forever,
but given enough time, I stop
seeing the canvas and start seeing you

That moment, bleeding like watercolor
through thin paper, sweet colorful accidents,
mournful in its way, but not unwelcome

Your yellows replaced by the tapping tempo
of your feet, your greens give way
to the rattles of your breath. I learn
the tunes you idly hum that used to only
make sense inside your head

You lose every color, but now I hear
your notes, the melody in everyday moments,
the orchestra of the mundane.
Your rhapsody has no blue,
but I listen, still, all the same

If it is my lot to always trade painting
for music, it's a price worth paying

But it's still fucking bullshit that I have to.

The Pleasure is All Theirs

Romy Morreo

Playing dead for the vultures
was a learned behaviour.
Birds will be birds; let them feast
on your tenderest places, warm
        welcoming wet
and don't resist
when their beaks, moist, slimy
smear your stinking slick
across your thighs.
Your body is an invitation
        to salivate
so lie back like a good carcass;
you're supposed to enjoy
                being eaten.

Poem in the Voice of the Author's Queerness

Maggie Lisbon

—after C. Bain

Remember in seventh grade they forced you to meditate?
They said to picture a box with a hefty lock,
visualize a fear:
disease, gun violence, dying alone,
anything keeping you up at night.
You said, *I think Rose Tyler is pretty*
a little too much, maybe.
That was the first time I extended my hand,

but even back then I was afflicted
with the words you'd heard from your brother
when you made softball team captain:
lesbo, dyke, what are you, a queer?

They told you to shove me in the box,
snap the key and heave it all into the depths
of your consciousness. Turns out you were good
at it; whenever I pried my fingers under the lid, you stomped
a sneakered foot and thrust me back into my casket.

I spent a decade buried alive,
scrabbling my fingernails ragged. I just needed
to explain myself, just needed you to realize
all I've ever done was love you. Instead I suffocated
as you learned to drink yourself to vacancy,
to let boys zip tie your wrists to bargain bed frames and beg
yourself to like it, to hover your hands
over the hips of the waltz instructor as she modeled
the correct way for a woman to spin.

I understand why you padlocked me away.

I'm difficult to define, inconvenient to flag.
I need nuance no dictionary can propose; *sapphic*
is too pretty a word for the clumsy way I covet,
desire choking in my throat, rarely reaching
lower than my lips. Lusting
for sodality rather than sex. But

we both saw the news last weekend.
I noticed it quashed down in the darkness
with me: the image of a dance floor glossy with blood,
rosy and smeared as the lipstick
the time you tequila-tilted into a painted mouth.
Next time it could be us pulsing
plasma underneath the points of stilettos,
and it would be my fault.

Have I told you I'm sorry?
That I couldn't wait for the world to entomb
its own visualized nightmares before announcing
myself. That my throbbing fists
became too riotous to keep bolted up.
That these hands grasping
for yours are what keeps you up at night.
I understand if you don't want to welcome
me home yet. Just please, don't you be the one to destroy
me when so many would kill to take us out.

Intimacy

Wren Bee

It's queer
to reach out with hands
that are not hands
to feel the shape of You,
beyond those curves
delicately fingering
without fingers
electric along the trembling spine
of you, more than You,
to hold, not touch

An emerald hummingbird probes
the lantanas give up their scent
The passionflower vine
has sprawled, entwined against the beans,
meeting essence to essence, equals in
their dance, holding up the other
without consuming
I'm learning
I can hear their crying, laughter

Indecipherable

Sabah Merchant

I can speak three languages,
Understand four,
Read five.
But I cannot comprehend
Mouths melting together,
Probing bodies,
Twisting hearts and burning desires.

I see them through a wall,
Dust and fingerprints between us
As I seek to learn another tongue;
A tongue that is red and pink—
Cherry red, or so they say—
In the poems of fire and ashes
And intoxication and deliriousness.

Lovers become one
On inky words engulfed by crumpled paper,
And strokes of the brush spreading
Crimson paint across an unreachable canvas,
On pillows in candlelight,
Alien heartbeats and bewildering fights,
Touching hair and thighs and ankles
And lips and eyes and waists and jaws and—

Words that I will never understand,
Even though I know them better than
The tongues of my compatriots.
Maybe Kannada is easier to comprehend
Than the language of desire.

Pride 2024

C.K. Winter

Trying to type,
I am frozen with anger
and despair at myself
for all the ways
I am wrong

in heart,
mind and body;
an absence of feelings
yet overwhelmed

by useless empathy,
the gaps in my mind
that keep me from others,
a hidden self,

unable to connect or belong,
queer but not in the right way,
it's just nothing, and how
can you celebrate that?

Ace Ring

Meredith Stafford

arms reaching,
consuming and creating:
sterile stainless steel
a black hole or odd radio circle
with galaxies in its burning belly
— hot from birth or supernova,
silvered and aged, meteor-streaked —
each milky star a searing
promise of *I am* spilling
into the dark's
infinite embrace

I don't deserve a poem

Maia Brown-Jackson

I've always known there was something *bad*
nestled somewhere amongst whichever organs are clustered tightest,
but I don't remember my biology too well and if I knew where it was
it would probably just find somewhere new to hide
because if I could find that malignant piece inside,
if *lack* could become a tangible thing,
fearing it might radiate neutrinos like an exploding sun
if it ever got out
I would kill it before it had the chance,
without hesitation.

Hell, I would kind of hope I died with it,
penance for ever allowing it space to grow.

I don't know where it came from
or why it's there.

Epigenetic trauma, my therapist calls it;
the reason I need to earn every inch space and breath of air, I call it.
The reason I can never be good enough, even for this shit world,
even if I waste my life trying.

But it must be the reason everyone insisted on
polite, proper behavior as a child,
all pleasing grandmothers and learning etiquette from the nannies,
because *it's* the reason I somehow still act too impulsive and impatient and self-destructive.
It's the reason that the "polite eye contact" I was taught
metamorphosized all on its own into the "too intense a gaze" I hear about on dates,
a warning sign for others that there's something strange about me;
how *it* reminds me I learned to say yes and yes and yes
and let it go when the "no" I fight out past my larynx
goes ignored;

like how it tells me I deserve it.

It's probably the reason all my relationships
should have come with a warning label.
Hell, a "toxic waste" sign,
and maybe some hazmat suits for good measure
because no one thinks to bring their own.

> *Keep it secret. Keep it quiet.*
> *When someone knows, they might accept all of me.*
> *They might learn to love a creature like me.*
> *And they'll get hurt.*

Because girls like me don't get a "happy ending."
Or a "happy middle."
We just debate our own survival; dispassionate; calculated:
and think, they should've let me die like I tried to at birth.

If I'm not protecting the world from the thing I cannot kill,
it means I'll have just callously, ruthlessly, *mercilessly* passed it on to be
someone else's problem,
finally proving it right;
finally, tactless and opportunistic,
letting it loose just so I could breathe.

At least *I'm* used to it.
At least *I* already know what I really am.

The problem is that it's spread low and heavy but it's starting to rise,
my epidermis trapping it with nowhere to go but up,
like the devil's smoking another foul-smelling cigar
inside of me. I think that hollow chasm that cancerous, loathsome
thing is trying to sneak outside the prison of my flesh
with each of my exhales,
and I can't let it slink away slow from my mouth
so I just wonder how long I can hold my breath because
I can't let it infect this world.

I'll keep crushing it, as much as I can,
with *whatever* I can,
and don't much mind the desecration done to me on the way
because why would it care about its host?

What the hell is this, though?
Is it even a fucking poem?
Of course not.
I'm not worth that.
Not worth the energy that's powering my laptop
as my fingers expose the words
that have lingered just beneath the surface for years
so that it took just an unexpected instant of anguish
(I let myself hope, see?
That was the problem.
That's how it gets you.)
to let loose a slurry of self-indulgent nonsense.
At least it's true.

One day I won't be strong enough to keep it in anymore.
It's a good thing I probably won't be around see the world after that.

Oh.
I must not have much of a future then.
I almost wish I were more disappointed.

This is a remix to heartbreak

Kinno

Come, smell the stink of some man you let break into your rib cage
That mediocre man you let into your mushy places
You don't quite know lust, even though you've been trying to find it
But, they surprise you each time

Now, by night on the prowl to show the evening people that, in spite of it all,
There's poetry spilling out of you in black goo
Like a lengthened neck the bass at this
Bar [where nobody dances but there's a $20 cover]
Booms and drapes

Yes, I've been around. I've been
Drunk in every corner of this city
Under cover of night, I watch how the people do it
How they're filming for their [boring ass] Instagram
The ones that watch and that are watched
I don't get it!

Man, come and get me
I let a [man] hurt me and hurt me and hurt me again because despite
My stank face and lack of interest in people's nighttime activities
And as unknown as I am in this pulsation of too loud music
I am ashamed to say
I don't know the difference between a kiss and a fist!
I keep having to venture into myself to figure me out
Love isn't sex, but love is sex, [so, obviously, to be loved you must be sexed!]
But, it don't work! [It never works]

[Of course not, you neuroweirdo, you attention-seeking slut, you incorrectly asexual rat!]

They’ve said that I am beautiful
That they love me
That they want to be like me
And I wonder, who they think “me” is when I never introduced myself
I am just teeth and big hair, let me tell you
It will be hard to love me, I have to do it every damn day

MAIDENHEAD

Kee Harriott

he says
don't forget your mittens
        & your knitted cap
you get cold too easily
going inside of my
        bed

the plow on the street
shoves snow into the yard
        plumes shooting
white stars cold & hard

how to clean without salt:
don't get anything dirty
        in the first place

raw & soft
the inside of my leg like
a stretch of scalp
scratched too much

take your fingers out of my hair
take your fingers out of my mouth
take your fingers out of my snow

turning the corner the plow
blows & blows & blows

the salt truck comes after
laying hard crystals down
        in the broken road

Before Bed

Bart Edelman

I've made my bed—
Well, most of it, anyway,
And intend to climb in,
When the time is right.
For now I'm just cruising,
Living day by day,
Nothing out of the ordinary.
I'm content, simply, to be,
Leave progress for others,
Who need the affirmation,
Scaling this peak and that—
No man's land in my view.
Hey, have you heard
The one about the spider,
Caught in a web of intrigue,
Unable to escape what gossamer
It created as a trap—
Another tale of woe.
So, no spinning for me,
Until I know how to stop.
Besides, wrinkles still remain
In these sheets I iron,
Night after night after night.

Go on, Murder Your Lovelies

Nathan Chu

Screw the cover letter, the resume, the statement of purpose,
The poem, the summary, the synopsis,
The novella, and novel, and novelette

Slash their throats and let
Letters spill red
Into white space

They seek to trap your soul in lines
So few, so cramped
Our hearts in a couplet

How to jam
Things so bizarre
Arrayed with limbs
And flailing

Evolving(?) past
The writer's hand
And slopping on their desk

Bag it up and mail it
To someone who cares.

Rejected Study on Oddities of Existence

Coney Zhang

If you tap against the glass, then I just might blink back
but maybe I'll stare at the imprint you leave, defying
your expectations for a garnered reaction from this
experiment.

You're under the assumption your proposed hypothesis
will help enhance my way of living
as long as you administer the correct doses
of *I can fix you* and *I'll change your mind*,

but you've forgotten the null statement
supporting the absence of any significance. I do not
combust like chemical formulas prophesize. Your toxic
prodding will never yield desired results.

Boiling me down as one more frog you keep inside jars,
I'm ashamed for the jellyfish shoved in the beaker beside me.
We speak in Morse code when your back is turned,
too busy playing with catalytic compounds, fixating
on enigmas rather than fussing over what's broken.

We were never broken.

Yet what is a subject to the scientist? Mere souls in need
of saving? Lost causes seeking salvation?
Your curiosity is burdensome and your ignorance, volatile.
I am predictable in the sense that you've pushed me
past my boiling point.

Exactly how many *crackles* and fizzy *pops* do you think
my heart might make?

I'll eat the jellyfish before you dissect us both
for an explanation.

I’m Asexual, BUT

Ria Hill

I want to be fucked by your art
Sufficiently fucked
Fucked so hard my knees buckle
And my legs shake
Fucked so hard that when the show ends
I say I need a cigarette
When you offer me a light, I laugh

(I don’t smoke)

I want your art to fuck me so hard I can’t breathe
Except to whisper come-ons so crass
They were previously unthinkable
Except from the mouths of women
(Written by men)

I want your art to fuck me so soundly
I will be feeling it for days
I want to wake up from a wet dream
Next Tuesday
With the honey-sweet remnants
Of your words on my tongue
Where I repeated them after you
Placed them there for safekeeping
In this case,
I don’t spit or swallow

I savor

I want your art to fuck me in ways I’d never imagined
With no apologies
When you hear me give a little gasp
From a part of the room you can’t reach

Know that it is because your last sentence
Has laced its fingers through my hair
Pulled taut
Waiting to growl your next words into my ear

I want to be fucked by your art
Resoundingly fucked
Unforgettably fucked
When your next words come
I want to come with them
Until I've entirely lost sight of myself
And the only names that come to mind
Are the deities of forgotten faiths

And yours

Contributors

Gage Baldwin (He/They) is a queer poet in Oklahoma. His work centers the Queer Leather culture, using poetry to capture the present moment. Knowing how often Leather is erased from history, Gage documents the trust, defiance, and intimacy within underground sexual rebellion, so future Leatherqueers may feel connected to today.

Wren Bee is passionate about building community with their human and non-human neighbors based on mutual care and mutual aid. They are fascinated by both the connections and the spaces between people, which leads them to a wide variety of creative expression in an attempt to see more clearly.

A literature degree from the University of Chicago led **Maia Brown-Jackson** to myriad esoteric jobs, including volunteering in Iraq with Yazidi survivors of ISIS genocide. Newly inspired, she caffeinated herself through a Master's in terrorism and human rights, and now investigates the use of humanitarian aid in Taliban-controlled Afghanistan. Also, she writes.

Nathan Chu (they/them)/**MuZeTrigger** is a Washington State writer and teacher. When they're not teaching or writing, they enjoy cooking, flailing around on the bass guitar, and practicing Japanese. You can find them on Twitter and Bluesky @muzetrigger.

Bart Edelman's poetry collections include *Crossing the Hackensack*, *Under Damaris' Dress*, *The Alphabet of Love*, *The Gentle Man*, *The Last Mojito*, *The Geographer's Wife*, *Whistling to Trick the Wind*, and *This Body Is Never at Rest: New and Selected Poems 1993 – 2023*. He lives in Pasadena, California.

Kee Harriott is a senior at Arizona State University studying creative writing and Spanish. He has won two Glendon and Kathryn Swarthout Awards as well as a Glendon F. Swarthout Fellowship in Poetry. This will be his first major publication. You can follow him @bulk0wskee on Instagram.

Ria Hill is a queer, demisexual, Jewish writer and librarian who lives in Toronto. Their work is primarily horror, with fiction appearing in several

print anthologies and online magazines. They can be found online at riahill.weebly.com and on Bluesky, Instagram, and Threads @riawritten.

Kinno is a Black woman and writer based in Boston, Massachusetts. She has a lifelong interest in literature and has studied it in English, Latin, and Ancient Greek. They love all things horror and also nature a lot even though they are allergic.

Maggie Lisbon is an attorney by day, poet by daydream. She lives in New Jersey with a chaotic cat named Beans.

Sabah Merchant was born and raised in India, but currently lives in Japan, working in education and pursuing her writing goals at the same time. She enjoys traveling, attending concerts, and plotting her stories while swimming.

Romy Morreo (she/they) completed her MA in creative writing at the University of Chichester in England. She identifies as greyromantic-asexual. In both her poetry and fiction, she strives to represent the diversity within the asexual community, as well as her own raw, personal experiences.

Meredith Stafford (they/she) is a writer and artist from Chattanooga, Tennessee. They are currently an undergraduate student in creative writing at Berry College and a poetry grant recipient from the Georgia Writers Association. Their work has appeared in *Ramifications* and *Rock Creek Review*.

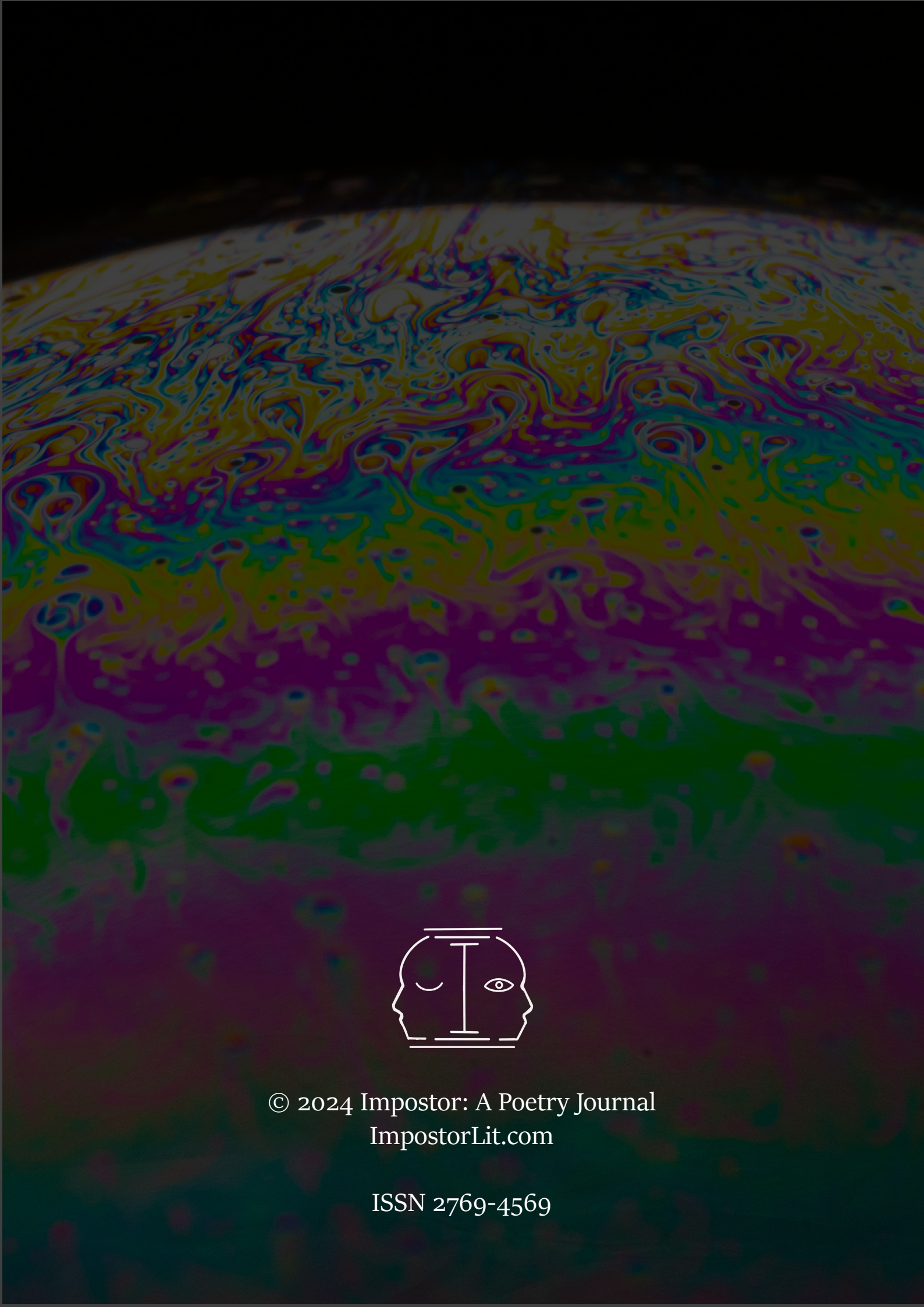
C. K. Winter is a librarian who writes poetry and occasional prose pieces on topics including living with chronic illness, neurodiversity, and television programmes.

Coney Zhang (she/they) is currently an associate editor for *Glassworks Magazine* and going through their last semester in college, intent to leave with both a biological sciences and writing arts degree. Her goal is to teach English abroad for a few years before pursuing a Master's in the future.

Editors

Hailing from rural Western New York, **Coral O'Leary** (she/her) is a lake-effect snow ex-pat, current New Yorker, queer poet, cultural worker, and asexual aromantic-spectrum sapphic. Find her on Instagram @ohcoralpoetry or www.coraloleary.com.

L.A. Wilson (she/her) is a writer of fiction, lover of poetry, and asexual-identifying individual. She holds an MA in creative writing.



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